DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 558 CS 508 042

AUTHOR Swanson, Georgia
TITLE Broadening the Horizons: Organizational Communication in the Real World.
PUB DATE 31 Oct 92
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (78th, Chicago, IL, October 29-November 1, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Activities; *Cultural Differences; Higher Education; *Multicultural Education; *Organizational Communication; Student Needs; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Baldwin Wallace College OH; *Curriculum Emphases; Organizational Culture

ABSTRACT

Working in the microcosm of an individual class, organizational communication instructors can broaden the student's horizon by starting with what are local types of diversity and then expanding the classroom understanding to include the larger world where that student is going to live and work. Speech communication teachers/scholars have seen changes coming in the emphases needed in all communication course work. In order for more and more curricula to include multicultural communication, higher education's senior management must be in the forefront of implementing multicultural programs on campuses. Instructors need to acknowledge that although senior management of institutions of higher education may need to be convinced of the need for multicultural education, instructors can begin the process within classrooms while they also work to convince others. Baldwin-Wallace College, a 5,000-student comprehensive college with old and deep roots in the traditional liberal arts approach, is attempting to broaden horizons in several ways, with college-wide special events programs, course assignments, and projects. Unless the student of organizational communication is aware that different and competing interpretations of the organizational life are operating, the student is likely to enter the organizational world looking for a singular organizational life when there is none. Demographics alone belie such an impression. (Contains 18 references.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED355558

Broadening the Horizons: Organizational Communication in the Real World

Georgia "jo" Swanson
Speech Communication & Theatre Department
Baldwin-Wallace College
Berea, Ohio 44017

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting
Speech Communication Association
Chicago, Illinois
October 31, 1992

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Georgia Swanson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS508043

"You see, Dad, Professor McLuhan says the environment that man creates becomes his medium for defining his role in it. The invention of type created linear, or sequential, thought, separating thought from action. Now with TV and folk singing, thought and action are closer and social involvement is greater. We again live in a village. Get it?" (1966)

The aim of this paper is to argue for the inclusion of a focus on multiculturalism particularly in the study of organizational communication, and that multiculturalism can be accomplished in different ways that complement each school, state, region, the United States and the larger world. In other words, by working in the microcosm of an individual class, an instructor can broaden the student's horizon by starting with what are local types of diversity and then expanding the class room understanding to include the larger world where that student is going to live and work -- "we again live in a village! Get it?"

For the purposes of this paper, the terms multiculturalism and cultural diversity will be interchangeable. (When a new trend is begun, often the terms are not standardized. We need only reflect on nonverbal or interpersonal communication as examples.) Foeman (1989) reminded members at the SCA in San Francisco that even the definition of culture has changed from one that emphasize organizational agreement or society-wide characteristics; however, this paper wants to promote a view of culture that is defined in its **multi** aspects including both genders, various ethnic groups who are and will be seeking jobs in growing numbers, as well as people of varying degrees of job preparation.

Each of the older definitions implied some level of across the board agreement as to cultural norms which Foeman argued "do not exist". She went further to note that Black American culture was often

described as a "sub" culture. The "one culture perspective...implies that 'sub' cultures give way to mainstream most of the time." However, the trend is that subcultures are no longer content with that approach. Foeman concluded, "As a result, many cultures grapple and compete for control over overall organizational perceptions. Thus cultures coexist side by side, albeit sometimes unbeknownst to one another." Later in the same paper, Foeman forecast the rationale for this paper:

"Unless the student of organizational communication is aware that different and competing interpretations of the organizational life are operating, the student is likely to enter the organizational world looking for a singular organizational life when there is none. Demographics alone belie such an impression."

Speech communication teachers/scholars have seen the changes coming in the emphases needed in all communication course work. Deethardt writing in Communication Quarterly in 1982 lay the blame for education's failure to produce comprehensive literacy skills to a time-bias favoring the present and past as the guidelines in designing curricular programs. He called for four areas to be emphasized the first of which was cultural diversity. Some ten years later at the Eastern Communication Association's meeting, Fine (1991) could quote the Workforce 2000 report by the Hudson Institution (Johnston & Packer, 1987) which noted the five demographic trends in the U.S. that will dramatically affect organizational life in the next century:

(1) Both the population and the workforce will grow more slowly.

(2) The average age of the workforce will increase and the pool of young workers will decrease.

(3) More women will enter the workforce.

(4) Minorities will increase their share of new entrants into the workforce.

(5) Immigrants will make up the largest share of the increase in the workforce since World War I.

Fine admits that although white males will continue to maintain a numerical edge for some time into the next decade, white men will shrink in number as new entrants into the pool of laborers. Thus, the new workforce will comprise greater diversity of gender, race, age, culture, and language. Then Fine extends these data to conclude that considering the changing demands of the economy as old industries die and new ones emerge, "the demand for workers will exceed the supply of those previously defined as 'qualified,' thus creating intense competition among organizations for workers. The competition for trained professional and technical personnel and supervisory/managerial personnel will be especially intense." It is this conclusion that underlines the necessity for higher education to train students for their more diverse and therefore complicated organizational climate.

"Cross-Cultural Communication: An Essential Dimension of Effective Education" was revised by its author Orlando Taylor in 1990. This handbook is the second part of a four-part series whose intent is to help those teachers dealing with Black and Hispanic students. Taylor gives seven areas that need to be included in such teaching because as he notes, schools tend to reflect the norms and values of the majority culture. When this does occur, the minority student's academic performance is negatively impacted. However, the author focuses on the teachers of "minority" students rather than on the "majority" students who so often fill the organizational classes in the smaller more traditional colleges.

The real example that the times are changing was reported by Barbara Ward (1990) concerning a multicultural demonstration

project at George Brown College in Toronto, Ontario, begun in 1985. Ward describes the more than 100 cultural groups that reside and work in the province and the pressure from the new groups for education that would equip them for jobs. The once homogeneous student body has become diverse in ways never imagined. The demands were a response to a community wide needs assessment that indicated the college needed to change; George Brown College added over forty accredited programs or courses. The courses ranged from computer-aided design and drafting for immigrant women to intercultural/race relations training programs for managers to college teacher training for new faculty. It is questionable that many colleges would have quite this level of need, yet this paper suggests that our many organizational communication classes are a natural place to strive for broader horizons. Plus the fact that most schools are surrounded by a community that does possess diversity that can be learned from as well as helped. Each of our institutions is part of that larger community, state, region, and nation. None of us is an island even if we do not yet see ourselves as part of a village.

Fine (1991) added another set of reasons why college class work should include an emphasis on multiculturism when she reported on the survey conducted by Towers Perrin, an international management consulting firm who recently surveyed senior human resource executives at 645 U.S. organizations asking how those organizations were dealing with or planning to deal with the issues found in the Workforce 2000 report. This is the direct quote from Fine's paper:

(1) The workforce is already diverse. Of the organizations in the sample, 60% report that workers of color represent up to 20% of their workforce, and close to 25% say represent over 26% of their workforce.

(2) Cultural diversity is a paramount concern to these organizations. Diversity concerns focus of the hiring and promotion of people of color and (what the human resource executives define as) special needs of women, e.g. child care, family leave, and flexible work schedules.

(3) Some companies are responding to the particular issues raised in the original Workforce 2000 report, but they are implementing very traditional solutions, e.g. to deal with the lack of basic skills of many new entrants into the labor force, many companies offer tuition reimbursement to employees, but few companies offer in-house remedial training programs.

(4) Developing new approaches is a function of top management. If senior management believes that the organization must respond to the changing demographics, the organization is more likely to develop new approaches to those changes.

As yet, this paper has not described beyond the American scene; "perhaps the greatest challenge involves how to communicate effectively in an international arena," stated Inman , Ownby, Perreault, and Rhea (1991). These authors describe the perplexing situation that occurs when an American senior management person "gets dumped" into an Asian or Mid-Eastern culture. Competition in the international market- place is increasingly fierce, and the necessary new skills that Americans need to be taught must include understanding other cultures and the customs both verbal and nonverbal that are expected when dealing in the global economy. In 1974 The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business urged that business schools teach a "world-wide dimension"; however, it was not until 1980-81 that that accrediting agency

mandated that "every student should be exposed to the international dimension through one or more elements of the curriculum" (as quoted in Inman et al.). Sorenson, Savage, and Orem (1990) when describing what the business schools and colleges teach in terms of communication, noted that more and more the curricula include multicultural communication.

In order for change to occur, higher education's senior management must be in the forefront of implementing multicultural programs on campuses. Of the 305 entries in ERIC since 1988 that note this paper's topic -- multicultural education particularly in the organization-- only several discuss campus wide programs to heighten student awareness (Roberts, 1990; Condon, 1986). Teachers of English as a second language are concerned, but the emphasis often focuses on trying to help the "minority" student adapt (Garcia, 1991; Coombe,1990; Kitao,1991). All the while, we who teach communication on a daily basis are faced with the opportunity of opening the eyes of our students to the real world that is not comprised of people just like us. "The IS of diversity is more-or-less recognized by all participants in this debate," said McGee and Simerly (1991). Nevertheless we must be aware of the ney-sayers.

The opponents of such multiculturalism were brought to the attention of those who heard or read the paper by McGee and Simerly at the 1991 SCA. In only a few pages these authors collected enough negative criticism of the teaching of cultural diversity to give pause to the most adventurous, not to mention "liberal" of instructors. The authors turned to the 1990 article in The Chronicle of Higher Education by Linda Chavez who attacked the idea of cultural diversity, arguing that "my own experience with promoters of this new ideology [cultural diversity] suggests that their real aim is to keep out certain ideas and certain people, to foreclose debate, to substitute

their own catechism for free inquiry usually associated with a university"(Chavez, 1990, p.B2). McGee and Simerly recounted many criticisms of the multicultural approach in their paper; however, they conclude by suggesting that the goal of multicultural education desires "to increase dialogue about alternate ways of 'doing' and 'knowing'. The McGee and Simerly wrote these lines: "When students and others 'broaden their horizons' as they become aware of alternative cultures, they are expected to become more receptive to discourse which is critical of their own culture. Social change seems less unreasonable, and visions of different realities become more appealing." With those noble goals in mind, this writer has some suggestions about how to broaden horizons.

First instructors need to acknowledge that although senior management of our institutions of higher education may need to be convinced of the need for multicultural education, we who face students daily can begin the process with in our class rooms while we also work to convince others.

What is presently occurring in the organizational class room? Pace (1990) surveyed what is being taught in organizational communication and although he admits that there was not a large response in terms of numbers of schools, he was able to note that most courses teach "theory". This writer argues that is where the organizational communication class work needs to begin. Part of the problem about managing diversity is that Western thought, according to Fine, is based on the hierarchical and competitive. She goes further: "A multicultrural organizational discourse invites everyone, regardless of cultural background, to participate in the dialogue in their genuine voices." So, we begin in class with what has been and discuss why those theories evolved as they did. In that way the students learn the historical reasons for what Kanter (1977) described

as organizations structured by "men who manage reproduce themselves in kind". Fine elaborates noting that the kinship metaphor for organizations attempts to fit everyone who enters the workforce into a preexisting vision of corporate culture. Returning to the admonition of Foeman, "Unless the student of organizational communication is aware that different and competing interpretations of the organizational life are operating, the student is likely to enter the organizational world looking for a singular organizational life where there is none"

Martindale who teaches journalism has a general suggestion that is adaptable for organizational communication which is that teachers adopt "the practice of infusing small modules of multicultural information into the whole range of courses...." She expanded the idea to say that repetition of material is necessary and that students need to understand that "being sensitive to and informed about various cultural groups is a standard part of a journalist's job, not an extra skill." Is that not also true of a communicator's job? As Foeman said, "It should be understood that this process goes on in different ways in different places throughout the organization. Students must be nurtured to understand that Black students, Asian students, Hispanic students, and White Anglo-Saxon Protestant students must evaluate communication 'skill' in the context of their own and other cultural beliefs, attitudes, and value systems--otherwise their communication will be ineffective."

What sort of information should be in those modules? First in most cases the members of the class will have both male and female students who reflect the diversity that exists in the work place because more women are entering work after college and staying in the workforce longer before beginning a family than ever before. After children are born, more women are returning to work in some

capacity even if it is only part-time. Perhaps the class contains members of several diverse ethnic mixtures or, if not, the community surrounding the school may contain several groups of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Students could learn some valuable skills if they were to survey their own institution and then the community conducting informational interviews, focus group data gathering, or other theory based and useful skills to discover the unique characteristics available locally.

The George Brown College example of conducting a needs assessment of the local community could provide vital information for an institution's continuing education program. At the same time positive relations could be promoted with those constituencies that surround the school. It is recognized that there is a certain amount of breaurocratic red tape that would need to be negotiated, but that gives the students a glimpse of what really goes on in life. Or, the students might take on a tutoring project with an appropriate group in terms of training. A great deal depends on the level of expertise of the students and the instructor's careful planning.

The "Western theory" basis for teaching is a valuable place to begin for our American organizations have sprung from a particular heritage which is an important place to begin, but not a place to stop. Knowing how things *have been done* does not provide a wide enough scope for the types of diversity that Americans must face in the 90's and beyond. Instructors can make use of other disciplines such as international business or classes in economics and include other instructors who might combine classes, projects, or just discussion about their joint interests. Local businesses which already have some multicultural organizational expertise could be used for field experience sites or merely as resources for informational interviews by students.

At the writer's institution, Baldwin-Wallace College a 5,000 student comprehensive college with old and deep roots in the traditional "liberal arts" approach, we are attempting to broaden the horizons in several ways. One of the college-wide special events program ideas begins in 1992-93 year. Entitled the "International Passport Program", each student will be given a "passport" at their first program and this will be stamped for each event that is attended. To be eligible for a prize, the passport must indicate at least 80% attendance and then by a random drawing at the close of the school year, a first and second prize will be awarded The first prize includes two tickets for travel within the continental U.S.; a second prize will be cash. The programs will vary from a Swedish "cradel" choir to an African dance troupe; from an African-American art exhibit to a Latin-American entertainment ensemble; from our local campus percussion group which specializes in Brazilian, Cuban, and West African music to a story teller from Gambia. Other groups are in the process of developing plans that will emphasis the diversity of the world's many cultures. Class-wide emphases can spring from the larger campus-wide programing.

Inman et al. (1991) stated that instructors need to sensitize their students to become aware that we American are "different" from others, and not that the others are "different" from us. The authors gave several examples of course assignments and projects that might heighten awareness on the international level. Writing a letter to a specific company in a particular country would provide such a sensitizing experience. A checklist of items to consider including the favored style of salutation, the format for paragraphing, organization, terminology, etc. would cause the student to become aware and to adapt to another culture's communication style. Inviting an international student, professor, or local business person to class was

another suggestion that could encourage the development of sensitivity. Before the visit, each student might develop questions aimed towards discovering information that would help an American adapt to that person's culture. Lastly, consultants who specialize in training traveling executives could also be a resource. Innman et al. conclude with these words that also can summarize this paper's hope: "Those who compete in the world market must understand the cultural context in which they are operating and must be flexible and understanding in applying appropriate yardsticks and assumptions, whether it is in person-to-person communication, in writing situations, or in an organizational setting where leadership, decision making, and teamwork are involved." True for all America!

References

Ares, H.P. (1991) French as a second language. Fitcherburg State College, MA.

Coombe, C. A. (1990) A globel perspective in the foreign language classroom. (Information Analyses, EDRS). FL 018987.

Deethardt, J. F. (1982). A future for speech communication. Communication Quarterly, 30, 274-81.

Fine, M.G. (1991) Multicultural voices in the workplace: organizational communication in the year 2000. Paper presented at the Annual Communication Association. Pittsburgh, PA.

Foeman, A. (1989) Organizational multiculturalism: towards a model of diversity sensitivity in the teaching of organizational communication. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association. San Francisco, CA.

Gayle, B. (1990) A participatory learning approach to teaching organizational video. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association. Sacramento, CA.

Hairston, J.T. (1992) Personal letter. Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea,OH.

Innman, T.H., Ownby, A.C., Perreault, and Rhea, J.N. Internalizing the business communication curriculum. Business Education Forum, 46, 19-22.

Isenhart, M.W. (1989) Combining divergent organizational cultures. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association. San Francisco, CA.

Kanter, R.M. (1977) Men and women of the corporation. New York: Basic Books

Martingdale,C. (1990) Infusing cultural diversity into communication courses. Journalism Educator, 45, 34-38.

McGee, B.R. and Simerly,G. (1991) So many cultures, so little time: an overview of cultural diversity. Paper presented at Speech Communication Association Annual Convention. Atlanta, GA.

McLuhan,M. and Fiore, Q. (1967) The Medium is the Message. New York:Bantum

Pace, R.W., Michal-Johnson, P., Mills, G.E. (1990) Trends in the basic course in organizational communication. The Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication, 53, 43-49.

Roberts, A.M. (1990) The game of multiculturalism. Campus Activities Programing, 23, 50-53.

Sorenson, R.L., Savage, G.T. and Orem, E. (1990). A profile of communication faculty needs in business schools and colleges.Communication Education, 38, 148-159.

Taylor, O.L. (1990) Cross Cultural communication: an essential dimension of effective education. American University: Washington D.C.

Ward, B. (1990) Report on George Brown College multicultural demonstration project. Toronto, Ontario, Canada.